1: Rosen E-5 (1901-1902) 1924 SK6 Choroti SK6

CHAPTER I.

The Choroti. (I). The country and the people. Dwellings.

Situation and extent of El Gran Chaco. Some attempts at interpreting the name of Chaco. Journeys of exploration in the Chaco. Geographical discoveries. Ethnographical research among the Choroti. The name of the tribe. Area of distribution. Physico anthropological observations. Villages. Huts and their furnishings. Cooking sheds and drying racks. Burning of villages.

El Gran Chaco (the great hunting ground) is the name given to the vast, partly forested, level country lying between the Andes and Rio Paraguay, the northern boundary of which roughly coincides with the parallel of 19 degrees of south latitude, whilst to the south it extends to about the 29th.

The meaning of the name of Chaco is not known with absolute certainty. Of the attempts at its translation so far made, in my opinion the most likely one is, that »chaco« (in quichua »chacu«) means an assembly, or the place for an assembly, especially for the purpose of game hunting on a big scale.[1] Against this supposition the Finnish scientist, Karsten, puts forward the objection that the Gran Chaco is nowise abounding in game, and that consequently the application of the name of »hunting ground« to this region would be hardly suitable; in addition, Karsten points out that there are no certain proofs in existence that the civilization of the Incas ever extended to the Chaco.[2] To this I would reply that although, as is known, *the interior* of the Chaco is deficient in game, its outskirts towards the Andes as late as 1902 to such an extent teemed with game, birds especially, that it is only in certain parts of Africa I have seen anything to compare with it. Therefore I think it very probable

[1] Lindman (1), p. 46.
[2] Karsten (2), pp. 23 and 24.

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[136] 114 that hunting expeditions were sent out from the ancient Inca kingdom to the Chaco, among other things for the purpose of obtaining rare and valuable material for feather ornaments. If, in the time of the Incas, the reaches of the Chaco bordering on the Andes were as well supplied with game as was the case when we visited those parts — a very probable thing — the mountain-dwellers had no need to make any hazardous trips into the far interior of the Chaco. These hunters probably only knew the border reaches, and the name then found appropriate to this region has subsequently come to include the whole of the flat country around the Pilcomayo and the Bermejo. That intercourse was carried on between the mountain peoples living within the ancient Peruvian dominions, and the Chaco inhabitants during the Inca period, may with very great probability be gathered from, inter alia, Baron Erland Nordenskiöld's excellent analysis of the civilizations of two Chaco tribes.[1]

The name, Chaco, has also been translated as »the flight», i. e., the place of refuge,[2] but I do not think it very probable that the conquering peoples would have adopted a name that was only applicable from the point of view of a small number of expelled tribes.[3]

At the time of our expedition, the greater part of the Chaco was on the map shown as an unknown territory. Up till then, no white man had followed the course of the Pilcomayo from the Andes to the Paraguay. Since then, great changes have taken place on the Chaco, and our knowledge of this region has been considerably increased. The course of the Pilcomayo has been mapped, and the Bolivian government has established military outposts practically in the middle of the Chaco.

But to this day large tracts of the Chaco are entirely unknown. This may seem strange, considering that the Chaco to the west and to the east borders on regions that for centuries have been visited by Europeans, and now to a great extent brought under the sway of civilization.

That the Chaco still includes immense tracts that are only inhabited by Indians, may, no doubt, be ascribed to the circumstance that the greater part of it is little suitable for colonization. Only on the border, and along certain reaches of the Pilcomayo and the Bermejo, has it been found possible to carry on agriculture to advantage, and, with the exception

[1] Nordenskiöld (11).
[2] Karsten (2), p. 24.
[3] Cf. pp. 29 and 75.

137 The dry-soil forests of the Chaco (figs. 3, 4, 5) consist of, generally, low-growing trees and thorny shrub, the latter often forming deep, impenetrable stretches of jungle. Species of columnar cactus (figs. 5, 6) are fairly common. The bottle tree (Chorisia insignis), which is typical of South American arid regions, is fairly numerously represented, but is never found growing in actual groves (figs. 4, 7). The thorny caraguatá, or chahuar, plant (Bromelia serra) is widely distributed on the Chaco, and is in many respects of great importance to the Indians, its chief and foremost utility being that, from its fibre, excellent yarn can be spun. Of great value to the population of the Chaco are also certain trees, growing in the forest, with edible fruit, of which, perhaps, the algaroba tree (Prosopis alba) is the most important. Game, as a rule, is very scarce in the [136] dry-soil forests; even in a whole day's shooting one may fail to come across more than a few bush partridges or wood pigeons. In some parts, however, ostriches (Rhea americana) are fairly common.

The plains, or steppes (see fig. 8), are often dotted with single tress and shrubs; usually species of acacia. Here and there the fan palm (Copernicia australis) may be seen growing in groves, or even forming whole forests; figs. 9, 10; scattered specimens of this palm are also found in forests that are mainly composed of other trees, fig. 79.

136 In the rainy season, when numerous shallow pools have formed, wading
137 birds may be seen in large numbers, and those parts of the Chaco that are nearest to the Andes, are, at least part of the year, *exceedingly abundant* in wildfowl. Then waders and water birds are, naturally, especially common on and around the flooded marshes that, only during a certain portion of the year, largely form on the Chaco. These marshes mostly have a vegetation of typical marsh plants; but I have also noticed that the species of fan palm, that is common in the Chaco, thrives well enough in such *periodically* swampy ground.

Near the Andes, the forests of the Chaco are made up of tall trees with a luxuriant undergrowth and a great wealth of lianas (figs. 11, 12—14). These forests, which are of an exuberant, tropical, primeval character, abound with game, such as jaguars, pumas, tiger cats, tapirs, wild boar, water pig, deer, ant-bear, armadillos, bush partridges, toucans, parrots, and a number of other birds, suitable for food.

136 The few rivers and watercourses with which the Chaco is supplied, are

[text continues on p. 9]

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136 very abundant in fish, and in their waters, as in most of the larger lagoons, alligators (Caiman sclerops) are present (fig. 15).

101 El Gran Chaco was in beginning of this century the country of the free Indians. Of the many tribes that inhabit this vast region, I have come into contact with Choroti, Chiriguano, Toba, Mataco and Tapiete, but it was only from among the first-mentioned that I had an opportunity to obtain any extensive collection.

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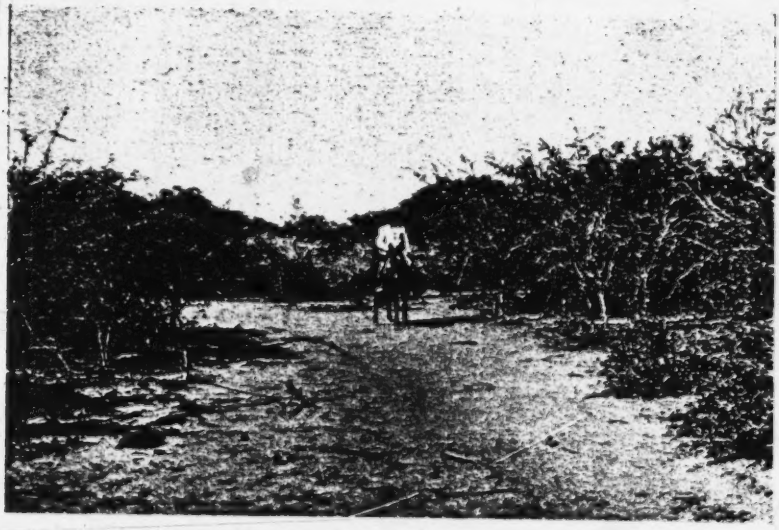

Fig. 3. Dry soil forest region. Gran Chaco. Bolivia. Photo. Rob. Fries.

101 114 In the literature dealing with the Chaco, there was, prior to our expedition, not to be found much information concerning the Choroti. Their tribal name, in the form of »xolota», was, however, known already in the 18th century, when it was, probably for the first time, mentioned by Pedro Lozano, who, in a work published in 1733, enumerates a long string of names of tribes inhabiting the Chaco.[1] In his work, »Explorations dans l'Amerique du Sud», Thouar only gives a few, stray, items of information about the Choroti, he having come across that tribe on the Pilcomayo. The Choroti were, therefore, at the time of our expedition a

[1] Lozano (1).

142 Of the Choroti among whom I carried out my investigations, the men

appeared to be fairly tall of stature,[1] figs. 16—19, 30, whilst the height of the women was remarkably small, figs. 19—22, 30. I took height measurements of ten men and thirteen women, but as the table got lost during the expedition, I am not able to give the maximum and minimum measurements. But I have the computed average heights preserved in my diary, and they are 170 cm for the men, and 152 cm for the women. The height measurements at a later date made of Choroti (who had come to look for work at sugar plantations in Argentina) by Lehmann-Nitsche show an average height of 161.6 for men (aver. of 20 individuals), and for women 155.3 (10 individuals). That Lehmann-Nitsche and I arrived at such appreciably divergent results is because our measurements were taken of so small a number of people. Lehmann-Nitsche having, however, measured twice as many males as I, it may be presumed that the average height obtained by him more nearly approaches the true average for the men of the tribe than does the result obtained through my measurements.

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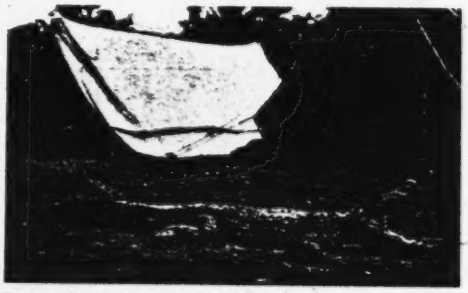

Fig. 15. Spectacle-cayman (Caiman sclerops). Camp at Tatarenda. Gran Chaco. Bolivia. Photo. E. v. R.

[304] The shape of the skull is predominantly dolichocephalic, and shows no traces of artificial deformation.[2] The men, as well as the women, are, as a rule, strongly and proportionately built, although in some individuals the breast is flat and the belly rather big (figs. 17, 37), the latter no doubt [262 146] resulting from the fact that the Choroti largely subsist on roots and fruits, a kind of diet usually producing distension of the stomach. As an example, in the rural districts of Europe it is no rare thing to come across persons, especially children, who, from a too-protracted diet of potatoes, have developed a distended stomach, a so-called »potato belly».

[1] That also among the Indians of the eastern part of the Chaco tall individuals are found, is evident from the following statement by Professor Carl Lindman: »Those Indians whom I saw along the Paraguay, opposite Asuncion and northwards, were to a large extent muscular and well-built, some, even, were very tall of body and athletic looking.» Lindman (1), p. 72.

[2] These items of information have been supplied me by Professor Gustav Retzius, who has examined the Choroti skulls brought home by our expedition.

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136 481 292 I have mentioned that the Choroti do not possess any water-craft, so that when fishing with nets they often have to wade or swim. In doing this, they expose themselves to being attacked by palometa fishes. As a protection for their legs in wading, the Indians occasionally wear a kind of mail stockings of caraguatá (see p. 54), but when they are swimming, they often get badly mauled by these fierce fishes, and I saw several Choroti with enormous scars from the bites of palometas (fig. 53). It also happens, now and again, that Indians, whem swimming, get killed by caymans, which, here and there, are plentiful.

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Fig. 118. Mesh-spacer of palo santo (Bulnesia sarmienti). Length 14.9 cm, width 3.0 cm; thickness along longitudinal axis 0.9 cm. The thickness decreases towards the longer edges, which are rounded. Choroti. Gran Chaco. Bolivia. Riksm. 03. 3. 242.

222 In the collection of the fruits, roots and pith of wild plants the Choroti possess an important source of subsistence. The Chaco Indians obtain edible fruits from, inter alia, the algaroba (Prosopis alba), the chañar (Gourliea decortitans), the mistol (Zizyphus mistol) and the tusca (Acacia aroma). The rootstocks of the caraguatá, or chahuar (Bromelia serra), plant are used for food by these Indians, and the same applies to the pith of the fan palm (Copernicia australis). For pulling down within reach the fruit-bearing branches of trees, the Indians make use of wooden hooks with a short arm and a long one, the latter then serving as a handle, whilst the tree branch which is to be bent down, is hooked with the shorter arm of the implement.[1] In digging up the spiny caraguatá plants the Choroti use a forked stick.[2]

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Fig. 119. Fishing hook of iron, with line of caraguatá fibre. Choroti. Gran Chaco. Bolivia. 1/2. Riksm. 03. 3. 238.

Fig. 120. Fish club of palo santo (Handle upwards). Choroti. Gran Chaco. Bolivia. 1/4. Riksm. 03. 3. 87.

At the time of my stay among the Choroti, the part of the tribe with whom I was in touch carried on no other agriculture than the growing of pumpkins in a primi-

[1] Nordenskiöld (11), fig. 3.
[2] Nordenskiöld (13), fig. 49.

2: Nordenskiöld E-5 (1908-1909)1919
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A C 133 river into the interior you will find numerous remains of old river-beds, which in places now form lakes. A few miles from the Andes there is not a stone to be found in the Chaco. The soil consists of fine earth, which is transformed in the dry season into whirling dust, and in the rainy season into mud. In the dry season large tracts are flooded. The Rio Pilcomayo is also of great importance to the Indians on account of the abundance of fish in it.

A C 137 The woods alternate in the Gran Chaco with grassy plains. In some districts there are considerable clumps of palms, not those with paripinnate leaves, which are so useful to the Indians, but with fanshaped leaves, which are of little use. There are no trees from whose bark cloth can be made, as in the primeval forests of N.E. Bolivia. In the woods there grows, however, a spiny plant[1]), known as Caraguatá[2]) or Chahuar[3]). It is of great importance to the Indians, its filaments providing them with material for string rope, clothes etc.

The arrow-grass[4]) which can be used for so many purposes, is lacking in the Chaco. Edible wild fruits occur in the Chaco in an abundance that is quite unusual in S. America. Some of these, such as Algarrobo[5]) Chañar[6]) Tusca[7]) and Mistol[8]), are of supreme importance to the Indians. The abundance of wild fruits, as well as the intensive dryness during part of the year and the floods during another part, account for agriculture being so undeveloped in the Chaco.

A C 136 The stock of game is poor in the interior of the Chaco, or at least in such parts as I have visited. The most impor-

[1]) Bromelia.
[2]) Guarani.
[3]) Quichua.
[4]) Gynerium saccharoides.
[5]) Prosopis.
[6]) Gourliea decortitans.
[7]) Acacia aroma.
[8]) Zizyphus Mistol.

2: Nordenskiöld E-5 (1908-1909) 1919
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A C 136

tant bags are field-voles, and in some places ostriches and small deer.

A C 132

The Chaco is intersected by the tropic of Capricorn, and is as a rule very warm. When the cold S. wind sweeps over the plains, however, it is bitterly cold, especially in May and June, and then the Indian, too, likes to wrap himself up in something warm.

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A civilization very similar to that of the tribes here mentioned is possessed by their neighbours, the Toba, Mataco, Tapiete and Lengua, as well as some other Indians belonging to that part of the Chaco which is included in the Republic of Paraguay.

In reality the present work deals, not only with the civilization of the Choroti and Ashluslay Indians, but equally with that of the Mataco, Toba, Tapiete and Lengua.

In the Chaco Boreal dwell the little known Tsirakua Indians. Near the Andes dwell the Chiriguano and Chané. The former of these, who are Guarani Indians, emigrated to these districts as late as the early 16th century. They came from the territory E. of the Rio Paraguay.[1])

It was the Chané Indians, at least in part, that had to yield to the Chiriguano the territories where the latter settled at the beginning of the 16th century, and where they still live to-day. They made slaves of the Chané. Remains of this tribe still dwell, as we have mentioned, in the same parts as the Chiriguano. They are now Guaranified.[2]) Yet a few of the Chané still have something of their original language. It is an Arawak language, and thus belongs to the most widely spread linguistic family in the whole of America. At the beginning of the 18th century numerous Chané Indians were still living in the Chaco Boreal, not far from the Rio Paraguay, where they were vassals of the warlike Mbayá. They are described as being of a higher civilization than their masters. Sánchez Labra-

[1]) Nordenskiold (13).

[2]) Nordenskiold, (8 B) p. 137.

2: Nordenskiöld E-5 (1908-1909) 1919
SK6 Choroti
Ashluslay SK5

curious that the Indians in these swampy parts should have worn leather sandals, which would soon have rotted away in a damp climate. When I passed from the mountains into the primeval forests of the border country of Peru and Bolivia in 1904—1905, my carriers had to take off their sandals at every brook we had to wade through, to keep them from rotting.

Also the (03) Tapuya, but not the Tupinambá on the Brazilian coast, had sandals. Of the former MARCGRAV[1]) writes: «Loco calceorum nostratium, è certo cortice *Curagua* ipsis vocato, factis utuntur atque illos vocant *Miapapacaba*, Lusitani autem *Alpargatas*.» Of Indians in the same region FREI VITAL DE FRESCAROLO[2]) mentions sandals out of Caraguatá.

It is probable that the Indians in the Chaco originally learnt the use of sandals in their present form from the culture zone in the west. Foot-gear in general, however, to judge from the wide-spread and partly sporadic use of it, seems to be a very old cultural element in S. America. Outside the old cultural zone in the west, where slippers were also worn, any other foot-gear than sandals is rare. In the form of very primitive leather shoes we only find it among the (26) Patagonians[3]) and the (27) Ona[4]).

In the swampy districts the Ashluslay wore a kind of *stockings*, made in a curious way, as a protection against the greedy and dangerous palometa fish (the pompano). I have not seen such stockings elsewhere, and have only seen a mention of them in a description from Venezuela, as early as the 16th century, SIMON[5]) mentioning them from the voy-

[1]) p. 271.

[2]) p. 115. «Alparcatas de cravatá, calçado com que andão nos matos.»

[3]) PIGAFETTA, p. 12.

[4]) GALLARDO, p. 155.

[5]) «. . lleuando algunos de los soldados algunas calças enteras de red con muy gruesos nudos, que se hallaron entre el demas pillaxe de aquella gente, que vsaban dellas en aquella Prouincia, para entrar a pescar en las